

Message Text

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C O N F I D E N T I A L LAGOS 6404

E.O. 11652: GDS
TAGS: PGOV, NI
SUBJECT: THE NEW CONVENTIONAL WISDOM: GLOOM

REF: (A) LAGOS A-49, (B) LAGOS 5254, (C) LAGOS 5066

1. IN A MAY 22 EDITORIAL COMMENT ENTITLED "OLD WINE, NEW BOTTLES," THE DAILY TIMES (DT) VOICES GRAVE CONCERN ABOUT WHAT WILL HAPPEN WHEN OVERT POLITICAL ACTIVITIES ARE LEGALIZED AT THE CONCLUSION OF WORK OF THE CONSTITUENT ASSEMBLY. THE DT NOTES:

--"WHAT DISTURBS US, IS NOT THAT PARTISAN POLITICS IS BACK WITH US. IT IS RATHER THAT WHAT WE SEE AROUND US IS QUITE INDISTINGUISHABLE FROM THE OLD POLITICS. THE SAME OLD PRESCRIPTIONS, THE SAME OLD RATIONALIZATIONS ARE BEING GIVEN 13 YEARS LATER AS LED US TO PERDITION IN 1965. TRIBE, RELIGION, LANGUAGE AND GEOGRAPHY ARE TODAY AS POWERFUL AS THEY WERE THEN. SECRET AND NOT-SO-SECRET CABALS ARE AT WORK AGAIN, AND NOW, AS THEN, WE APPEAR TO BE A NATION TRAGICALLY INCAPABLE OF DISCOVERING ANY BUT THE BASEST JUSTIFICATIONS FOR POLITICAL ACTION."

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2. REFERRING TO THE "MUCH-TOUTED "NEW BREED" OF POLITICIANS" WHO WERE SUPPOSEDLY ABOUT TO EMERGE ON THE NIGERIAN SCENE, THE DT OBSERVES GLOOMILY:

--"THAT PREDICTION HAS, AS OF NOW, GONE THE WAY OF ALL SUCH ROMANTIC HOPES. THE "NEW BREED" HAVE APPARENTLY CONCLUDED THAT IT IS NO USE

FIGHTING AGAINST OLD, ENTRENCHED FORCES, AND HAVE CHOSEN THE PATH OF ACCOMMODATION AND COMPROMISE. IT IS AN EMINENTLY SENSIBLE CHOICE FOR THOSE WHO HAVE LITTLE MORE TO LIVE FOR THAN THE SATISFACTION OF NARROW AMBITION. BUT IT IS HARDLY LIKELY TO JUSTIFY ANY GREAT HOPES FOR A NEW POLITICS NEXT YEAR."

3. THE DT EDITORIAL CONCLUDES WITH A CALL FOR NIGERIANS NOT TO ACCEPT THE FATE APPARENTLY BEING PREPARED FOR THEM.

--"ARE WE THEN CONDEMNED TO SO TAWDRY A FUTURE? ARE THERE NO CITIZENS AMONG US WHO HAVE THE COURAGE AND THE CONVICTION TO LEAD THIS NATION AWAY FROM THE FATAL GRASP OF THE SELFISH AND THE UNIMAGINATIVE? MUST WE RESIGN OURSELVES TO THE FATE ASSIGNED US BY ALL THE EMINENTLY "PARCTICAL" AND "REALISTIC" WARRIORS OF YEARS PAST? WE REFUSE TO ACCEPT THIS FATE. WE CANNOT ACCEPT IT. NOT NOW AN CERTAINLY NOT NEXT YEAR."

4. COMMENT: THIS DT EDITORIAL IS THE BEST EXAMPLE WE HAVE SEEN SO FAR OF THE GLOOMY CONVENTIONAL WISDOM ON THE PROSPECTS FOR CIVILIAN RULE WHICH HAS BECOME WIDESPREAD IN RECENT MONTHS IN THE NIGERIAN ATTENTIVE PUBLIC. A YEAR AGO, ON ENCOUNTERED AN CONFIDENTIAL

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ALMOST CHILDLIKE OPTIMISM AND ANTICIPATION FOR A RETURN OF CIVILIAN POLITICS. NOW, IN CONTRAST, THE CONVENTIONAL VIEW IS TO LOOK TOWARD POLITICS UNDER CIVILIAN RULE WITH INCREASING PESSIMISM. THAT ATTITUDE IS PERHAPS MOST STRONGLY SENSED IN UNIVERSITY FACULTIES, BUT AS NOTED ABOVE, IT IS INCREASINGLY COMMON IN THE POLITICAL PRESS.

5. THE CHANGE, IN OUR VIEW, IS ATTRIBUTABLE IN CONSIDERABLE MEASURE TO THE SHARIA DEBACLE IN THE CONSTITUTENT ASSEMBLY AND THE RECENT WIDESPREAD DISTURBANCES. THE LESSON THAT MOST NIGERIANS SEEM TO HAVE DRAWN FROM THE SHARIA EPISODE IS THAT THE EXPLOSIVE ETHNIC AND CULTURAL DIVISIONS WHICH MARKED NIGERIAN SOCIETY THIRTEEN YEARS AGO ARE ALIVE AND WELL BENEATH THE FACADE OF MILITARY RULE. FURTHERMORE, THE EVENTS OF RECENT WEEKS ON CAMPUS AND IN THE STREETS SEEM TO INDICATE TO MANY NIGERIANS THAT THE DIVISIONS IN THE SOCIETY COUPLED WITH THE TENSION OF RAPID AND UNEVEN DEVELOPMENT PROVIDE EVEN MORE POLITICAL DYNAMITE. AS A RESULT, THE ATTITUDE WITH WHICH MANY EDUCATED NIGERIANS ARE MOVING INTO THE POLITICAL TRANSITION

IS MARKEDLY MORE PESSIMISTIC THAN WAS THE CASE
SOME MONTHS AGO. THIS ATTITUDE COUPLED WITH THE
REAL PROBLEMS INVOLVED IN MOVING TO CIVILIAN RULE
IS BOUND TO HAVE SOME INFLUENCE ON DEVELOP-
MENT IN THE COMING MONTHS.
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